

MOUTH-OFF QUIZ: take the talk test

Teen

January 1998

celeb astro special
Taylor Hanson, Devon Sawd, Brad Renfro & Ryder Strong

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Teen

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48
Signs of Stardom

68
26 Ways to Charm

cover stories this month

slant

85 Road Trip Why Westport, Conn., is chichi but oh-so-cool.
87 Hot Look Take a trendy trip on Voyage.
88 What's Up The rules of resolutions and noteworthy newsbytes.

celeb site

42 Who's That Babe? Branden Williams bares his soul.
44 Listen Up Janet Jackson, 4.0, Lisa Loeb and lots more.
45 Watch It Jonathon Schaech and the hottest preview picks.
46 Mail Call Write to one of rock's royalty or other celebs.
48 Signs of Stardom By Julia Hamlin Marsden. Discover which stars share your sign and what's in store for both of you in '98.

real life

54 Quiz: Do You Say the Right Thing? By Maggie Keresey. Rate your communication skills and learn how to talk the talk.
56 Senior Class By Debi Martin-Morris. Time to check in with our five friends from Austin, Texas, and see how senior year's going.
60 True Story I'm Living With Cancer, by Kristen Drenten as told to Michelle Sullivan. Moving beyond a deadly diagnosis.
62 Why Smoking's a Real Drag By Debi Martin-Morris. Why teens are lighting up and what's being done to stop them.
65 For Real What's the status of race relations at your school?

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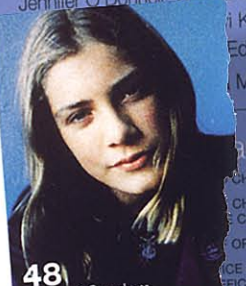
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WHY SMOKING?

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CIGARETTES

KILL AND EVERYONE KNOWS IT. SO HOW COME SO MANY TEENS ARE LIGHTING UP?

Lauren Kramer had been stood up by her best friend on a Saturday night. "We had this huge fight on the phone," says Lauren, a 17-year-old from Queens, N.Y. "She was supposed to be spending the night at my house, but instead she was hanging with these other people."

Lauren was pissed. She slammed the phone down, headed out the front door, sat on the front porch steps—and lit a cigarette. "It calms me down and helps me think," Lauren says of her smoking habit. "After I had a cigarette, I was able to go back inside, call my friend and work everything out. If I hadn't had one, I probably would have called her back and yelled and screamed, and it would have been a horrible night. Having a cigarette helps me control my emotions. My problems are still there, but the tension is gone."

So a cigarette saved Lauren's Saturday night. But at what price? Addiction to a drug that can cause cancer and heart disease. In other words, kills.

Photo: Courtesy: Deborah Dorn

S A REAL DRAG!

by Debi Martin-Morris

SMOKING-COPING SYNDROME

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) says nicotine, the psychoactive drug in cigarettes, affects brain chemistry, acting as both stimulant and sedative to the central nervous system. It increases concentration and alters the brain in seconds.

People who smoke may not care about the scientific stuff—like Lauren, they simply instinctively sense that they think more clearly after lighting up. That's how they get hooked. Life is full of problems, and if cigarettes become part of the coping process, grabbing a smoke to deal becomes an everyday (or every other minute!) occurrence, explains Ann E. Schenky, the director of the youth education program for the Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (CTRI) at the University of Wisconsin Medical School in Madison.

WHAT CIGARETTES DO (BESIDES KILL)

That's a real drag, since cigarette smoke is composed of a dozen gases (mainly carbon monoxide), nicotine and tar. The tar exposes smokers to high rates of lung cancer, emphysema and bronchial diseases, and carbon monoxide increases the chances of cardiovascular diseases. NIDA, the U.S. Surgeon General and the American Medical Association have all determined that the nicotine in cigarettes is as psychologically and physically addictive as heroin, cocaine and alcohol.

SCARY

Even scarier are these smoking statistics:

- According to the Surgeon General and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), 3,000 children and adolescents die prematurely from smoking-related diseases.
- An estimated 4.5 million children and teens smoke in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).
- Eighty-nine percent of all persons who ever try a cigarette do so by age 18; of those who smoke daily, 71 percent had smoked daily by age 18, says the CDC. The younger people start smoking, the more likely they are to become addicted to nicotine.
- More than 400,000 people die per year from smoking-related diseases, more than those who die from car wrecks, alcohol, drugs, sexually transmitted diseases and homicide combined, says the CDC.

ALL THE WRONG REASONS

Nicotine dependency is the most common form of drug addiction and causes more deaths and disease than all other addictions combined, reports the CDC. And when it comes to addictive behaviors, cigarette smoking is the one most likely to take hold during adolescence. So with all those people smoking, there have to be other "reasons" for it beyond being a coping mechanism.

And there are—especially if you ask young women. Some start smoking because it's still considered cool in certain circles (cigarette advertising sure tries to make it seem that way). Peer pressure is really powerful, and if the popular crowd says, "if you light up, you're down," that can be hard to resist.

Another draw for girls who start smoking during puberty is it seems to help with hormonal changes that cause mood fluctuations. "Nicotine works like other drugs when it comes to anger, depression and mood swings," says Elizabeth Stuyt, M.D., who runs a support group and specializes in addiction psychiatry at Lubbock's Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. "It goes to the pleasure center of the brain and says, 'Chill out! Everything's going to be OK.'"

Then there are the numerous studies that show nicotine speeds up metabolism and suppresses appetite—a big issue with girls concerned about their weight. Most teenage girls, once they start smoking regularly, may gain weight without changing eating or exercise habits. Research also shows that quitting smoking without changing eating or exercise habits results in weight gain, regardless of age. "I don't want to gain 10 pounds and most of the teenage girls I work with don't either," says Schenky.

QUIT OR MISS

About two-thirds of adolescent smokers say they want to quit, and 70 percent say they wouldn't have started if they could choose again. Trouble is, smoking is an addiction and kicking the habit can be as hard as quitting heroin, cocaine or alcohol, according to NIDA.

"I feel trapped," says Lauren, who's tried unsuccessfully to quit several times. Since first lighting up at age 11, Lauren hasn't been able to stop for more than a month. She smokes before and after school on weekdays, and on weekends inhales a pack a day and often chain smokes.

continued
63

S A REAL DRAG!

by Debi Martin-Morris

SMOKING-COPING SYNDROME

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) says nicotine, the psychoactive drug in cigarettes, affects brain chemistry, acting as both stimulant and sedative to the central nervous system. It increases concentration and alters mood. And it "works" fast: A puff of nicotine reaches the brain in seconds.

People who smoke may not care about the scientific stuff—like Lauren, they simply instinctively sense that they think more clearly after lighting up. That's how they get hooked. Life is full of problems, and if cigarettes become part of the coping process, grabbing a smoke to deal becomes an everyday (or every other minute!) occurrence, explains Ann E. Schensky, the director of the youth education program for the Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (CTRI) at the University of Wisconsin Medical School in Madison.

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And there are—especially if you ask young women. Some start smoking because it's still considered cool in certain circles (cigarette advertising sure tries to make it seem that way!). Peer pressure is really powerful, and if the popular crowd says, "If you light up, you're down," that can be hard to resist.

Another draw for girls who start smoking during puberty is it seems to help with hormonal changes that cause mood fluctuations. "Nicotine works like other drugs when it comes to anger, depression and mood swings," says Elizabeth Stuyt, M.D., who runs a support group and specializes in addiction psychiatry at Lubbock's Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. "It goes to the pleasure center of the brain and says, 'Chill out! Everything's going to be OK.'"

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continued

WHAT CIGARETTES DO (BESIDES KILL)

- Cause shortness of breath
- Lead to premature aging (skin wrinkles, especially around the mouth)
- Stain teeth
- Stain fingernails
- Stink up your hair and clothes
- Reduce rate of lung growth
- Make kissing you like licking an ashtray

For more information, contact your local American Lung Association at 800/LUNG-USA; Web site: <http://www.lungusa.org>

SOURCES: CDC; Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention; and the University of Wisconsin Medical School.

It's not that Lauren's surrounded by smokers at home who don't care about her (or their own) health; in fact, her mother is an associate director of the American Lung Association in New York! "I tell her about the people I know who died of lung cancer," says her mom, Joanne Kramer. "I bring posters and brochures home. I say to her, 'Who would want to kiss you, Ashtray Breath?' If I see her smoking, I grab the cigarette; if I find a pack, I throw it out. Once I made her smoke a half a pack of cigarettes, one after another, until she threw up. That didn't work. It's really sad, considering my job is to increase public awareness about the dangers of cigarettes and I can't even get my own kid to quit."

an addictive drug, which might change the way cigarettes are made and distributed, making it even harder for teens to buy them.

The issue of teen smoking is big at the state and local government level too. In parts of California, Florida, Texas and Illinois, for example, fines ranging from \$25 to \$250 may be doled out to convicted underage smokers. Other penalties can include driver's license suspension, community service and/or attendance at a tobacco-awareness class.

Another controversial tactic being discussed is the banning of all cigarette advertising that teens might see. "There's little doubt that advertising geared toward teens is a prominent factor," says CTRI's Schensky. "It's



The average price of a pack of cigarettes is about \$2 in most states, so a pack-a-day habit can cost \$732 a year and \$7,320 over 10 years.

"It gets harder to quit the older you get," says Susan Kleir*, a 20 year-old college student from Chicago who started smoking at 14. "I don't actually enjoy it anymore. I smoke because I can't stand the way I feel when I don't smoke—it's PMS times 10."

Alisa Flaum, 23, says she'd quit, "if I didn't think I'd go insane. There are so many things in my daily life I don't know how to do without a cigarette. I've never driven a car without a cigarette. I've never worked at my computer without a cigarette."

Quitting isn't easy, but it can be done. Getting off nicotine should be gradual, so withdrawal symptoms are less severe and relapse is less likely. The optimal treatment combines counseling and support groups with nicotine replacement medications such as nicotine chewing gum or the transdermal patch, both of which wean smokers off nicotine.

JOE CAMEL'S WALKING PAPERS

Reducing teen smoking is a Clinton administration priority. The idea is to make it difficult for young people to get cigarettes. Last February it became unlawful for cigarettes to be sold to anyone under age 18. Already, a pack-a-day habit is costly, not only physically but financially. With the average price of a pack of cigarettes hovering around \$2 in most states, a pack-a-day habit can cost \$732 a year and \$7,320 over 10 years. And President Clinton has proposed increasing the price of a pack of cigarettes by \$1.50 over the next 10 years!

Clinton and Congress will debate in 1998 whether the FDA will be given the authority to regulate nicotine as

no wonder the three most popular brands with teens are the most advertised ones."

Those who support banning cigarette advertising point to a study that found 6-year-olds to be as familiar with Joe Camel as they were with Mickey Mouse. (Joe Camel's employers have already decided not to use the cartoon figure in any future campaigns.) But banning cigarette ads will not by itself keep teens from smoking. "Every semester I ask my students to raise their hands if they smoke—lots of hands go up," says Frances L. Collins, an assistant professor of advertising at Kent State University in Ohio. "Then I ask how many smoke because of cigarette advertising. No hands go up. They laugh. That's hardly a scientific sample, but the idea that kids smoke because they see a colorful cartoon character is like saying kids speak in a high, squeaky voice because Mickey Mouse does."

Alisa agrees. "Joe Camel looking cool has no effect on me," she says. "I'm completely indifferent to the Marlboro man." So what did get her started? Alisa can't put her finger on any single factor: For her, smoking was a social thing—and that's the way it begins for lots of girls. "Most teenage girls who experiment with alcohol or marijuana don't do it all the time, but the girls I work with are likely to smoke all day, every day," says Stuyt. "They don't even know they're addicted—until they try to quit."

Just ask Alisa. "I'm a full-fledged nicotine addict. I have asthma, my father is a physician...yet I can't stop. It defies all rationality—it's just crazy. I really wish I'd never started." □

Photography: Jon McKee; Makeup: Miriam; Profile: LA. Hair: Neeko; Crystal Agency, Styl: Leon Ward